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ABSTRACT

Two decades of research show that parental involvement is associated with greater student achievement, improved parent and student attitudes toward education, and additional parent participation in other school activities. These conclusions are applicable to students at all educational levels and from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Aware of parental participation benefits, schools are exploring creative ways to involve parents directly in the learning process. This Bulletin explores parents' involvement in their children's education, combining research references with reports on individual school practices. Chapter 1 provides supportive research findings on parental involvement and explores James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer's "social capital" theory. Chapter 2 discusses programs for preschool, elementary, and high school children and their parents that positively affect student achievement levels. Chapter 3 concentrates on two academic programs ("Reading Is Fundamental" and "Family Math") that teach parents how to become more effective partners in their children's education. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations for parents, teachers, school boards, and state boards of education. Included is an appendix with program names and addresses, a bibliography of 33 references, and 15 interviews. (MLH)

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INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

Thomas E. Hart

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Preface

Involving parents in schools is not a new concept. Most school districts proudly point out the many and varied activities that volunteer parents perform for their schools. Most schools believe that they have active and supportive parents who participate in school activities as individuals and as committees. Most parents believe that they are generous in giving their time and expertise in response to requests by teachers or school officials. However, as this Bulletin points out, typically much of this involvement has been in areas aside from the schools' academic programs.

Beginning with reference to recent research and then citing examples of a number of different programs, the author argues that parents can become involved in the academic programs of their children. Academic involvement not only produces academic improvement, but also leads to a more positive attitude toward school by the students. Parents also increase their interaction with each other, with the schools, and with their children. This improvement occurs without regard to socioeconomic status or educational achievement of the parents. Examples of effective programs support the case for involving parents in the *academic* programs of the schools.

This Bulletin was written by Tom Hart, an OSSC graduate research assistant and a doctoral student in the Division of Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. He has held a number of chief administrative positions in international and overseas schools.

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

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Introduction

Over the last two decades many studies have investigated the effect of involving parents in their children's education. The results of these studies are nearly unanimous in their conclusions—parental involvement is associated with greater academic achievement by students; improved attitudes, on the part of both students and parents, toward education and the schools; and additional participation by parents in other school activities. These conclusions are applicable to students at all levels of education, and from diverse social and academic backgrounds. Likewise, the parents involved in the studies were also diverse in their own educational levels and their socioeconomic status. The common ingredient for success is that the parents have a sufficiently strong interest in their children's education that they become active participants in the process, most often at home.

Against this backdrop of research, individual schools and school districts are increasing their efforts to enlist parents in the academic process. For many years schools have appreciated the time parent volunteers spend in fund-raising activities, in clerical and supervisory assistance, and as active participants on advisory councils and school boards. Now, aware of the benefits that come when parents assist with the education of their children, schools are exploring creative ways of involving parents directly in the learning process.

Although suggestions for this involvement have come from parents, teachers and administrators, it is most often the school that takes the initiative. Frequently, it is the classroom teacher who brings a student's lack of progress to the attention of a parent, and they discuss a program of school-home cooperation that they hope will result in greater academic success on the part of the student. Some teachers have suggested that principals conduct training sessions for parents about how to act as tutors for their children and how to monitor their work. District-level administrators become involved when schools request funds to send teachers and parents to workshops conducted by outside agencies (such as universities) for training in specific programs that require school-home cooperation.

This Bulletin explores the topic of parental involvement in the educa-

tion of their children, working from the premise that it influences academic success and engenders favorable attitudes toward school. The Bulletin combines references to the research with reports on the practices of schools that are successfully involving parents. Readers who are interested in exploring further the research on this topic should find the reviews of Rhoda Becher (1985), Kathleen Cotton and William G. Savard (1982), and Anne Henderson (1981 and 1988) (all found in the bibliography) particularly helpful as guides to the original research.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of some basic research findings that suggest the benefits of direct participation by parents in their children's learning. Additional support for parental involvement is found in the "social capital" theory that has been recently propounded by James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer (1987). Chapter 2 discusses involvement as it occurs at the different levels of education, from preschool through secondary. Chapter 3 focuses on some recent programs that schools in Oregon and in other parts of the nation have found effective. The Bulletin concludes with some recommendations for schools that would be interested in establishing a program of parental involvement.

Chapter 1

Rationale for Parental Involvement in the Academic Process

This chapter first presents research findings that lend support to the claim that involving parents in their children's education elevates the latter's academic achievement. Next the chapter explores James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer's (1987) "social capital" theory, an attempt to explain why involvement has positive results, even when the parents themselves have low socioeconomic status and minimal educational background.

The Benefits of Parent Involvement

For decades many parents have been actively involved in school affairs. They have contributed time and resources to raise funds, serve on committees, supervise field trips, perform clerical duties, and be a positive presence in the community for the schools their children attend. Important as these activities are, parents can play an even more important role by becoming directly involved in their children's academic progress. For some parents this role is restricted to signing report cards. But for others it includes incorporating schoolwork into the home environment in such a way that it can be discussed and made a vital part of a child's sphere of interests. Principals of the schools where teachers and parents are working together to achieve this are excited about what can be accomplished. As one Oregon elementary school principal expressed it,

I love the cake bakers and the volunteers. They do tremendous work and we couldn't get along without them. But [assisting with the academic work of

their children] is a whole new level of involvement.

Her school has had an active coordinated program of parental involvement for three years, and the school will not only continue the program but expand it.

This kind of parental involvement in their children's education has come only after years of research have "legitimized" what sociologists and anthropologists have been saying about the development of children in cultures across the globe: the home is the first learning environment children experience. A child's home environment and the degree of parental involvement continue to exert their influence as the child grows. But because the school is where "formal" education occurs, many people lose sight of the fact that the education a child receives at home can be at least as powerful as what is experienced in school and—here is what excites educators—can also dramatically influence what is learned in school. Herbert Walberg's extensive 1984 analysis of reviews and quantitative synthesis of all available studies of productive factors for education conducted in the 1970s led to his statement that

school-parent programs to improve academic conditions in the home have an outstanding record of success in promoting achievement. What might be called "the alterable curriculum of the home" is twice as predictive of academic learning as is family SES [socioeconomic status]. . . . Although the average effect was twice that of SES, some programs had effects ten times as large; and the programs appear to benefit older as well as younger students.

He points out that the time a student spends in school—12 years of 180 6-hour days—adds up to only about 13 percent of the total time a child could potentially devote to active learning during the first 18 years of life. If some of that time were to be spent in some academically stimulating pursuits in the home and among peers, then more time would be educationally productive. What he means, of course, is that the home, by using such programs as Family Math, described in chapter 3 of this Bulletin, could reinforce what is learned at school. Students *are* learning from their home environment, but often do not see the relationship between that learning and what they are taught at school. Thus, children can calculate how much change they should receive from a transaction at the store, but find it difficult to add and subtract decimals in a school setting.

Overwhelming Support

The stimulus for parental involvement was the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which specified that parents were expected to assume a more direct role in their children's formal education. Once the involvement began, research studies followed to ascertain if it was effective

in achieving the gains it was designed for. Kathleen Cotton and William G. Savard (1982) grouped the areas studied into four categories, which they phrased as hypotheses:

The involvement of parents in the instruction of their primary and upper elementary level children has a positive effect on the academic achievement of those children.

The involvement of parents in the instruction of their primary and upper elementary level children has a positive effect on the school attitudes, self-concepts and learning motivation of those children.

Students from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minority students, and students with learning disabilities experience improvements in academic achievement and affective outcomes when their parents take part in their instruction.

Providing training to parents in instructing their children increases their effectiveness in the instructional role.

Citing the studies relevant to each hypothesis, Cotton and Savard found the research overwhelmingly in support of each of them. The reports they cite for each hypothesis address different factors, so the scope of the research is wider than would first appear. For example, the first hypothesis is supported whether the parents serve as tutors at home, make themselves available for regular discussion sessions, provide feedback on the results of student homework, or serve as instructional helpers in their children's classrooms. But it was also found that parents' attitudes, self-concepts, and rapport with the school have been demonstrated to become more positive when they become involved in their children's instruction.

Of great interest to those concerned with the problems of students with a lower socioeconomic status is the fact that students who come from these backgrounds, who are members of ethnic minorities, or who have learning disabilities are *greatly* benefitted, academically and affectively, when their parents become involved in their instruction. Cotton and Savard also mention that one report of a study of low-achieving junior high students concluded that "parental involvement in remediation and restructuring the home environment facilitates gains which continue in the absence of outside supervision."

The types of involvement that were studied vary greatly. They include home tutoring, providing feedback and correction on student homework, monitoring and supporting student study skills at home, parent-student discussion periods concerning schoolwork or pleasure reading, and parent-assisted learning within the school setting. In nearly all cases there were achievement increases. Cotton and Savard's conclusions parallel those of Anne Henderson (1981 and 1988), who contends that parental involvement

improves student achievement and that the form of parental involvement does not seem to be crucial, so long as it is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting. She even cites one report that found that schools with active PTA chapters had higher average student achievement, regardless of their social background.

Stimulus of Positive Attitudes

One is tempted to wonder whether a Hawthorne Effect influenced these findings. Does performance increase because of what is actually being done—for instance, the parent correcting the student's homework—or does it increase because the student, aware that parents and teachers are interested in how he or she is performing, works harder? The answer appears to be that both are true; performance is affected both by the activity and by the attitudes parental involvement encourages. Cotton and Savard discerned a close relationship between positive affective states and academic achievement; indeed, they said, the "positive affective results of parent-supported instruction are truly profound."

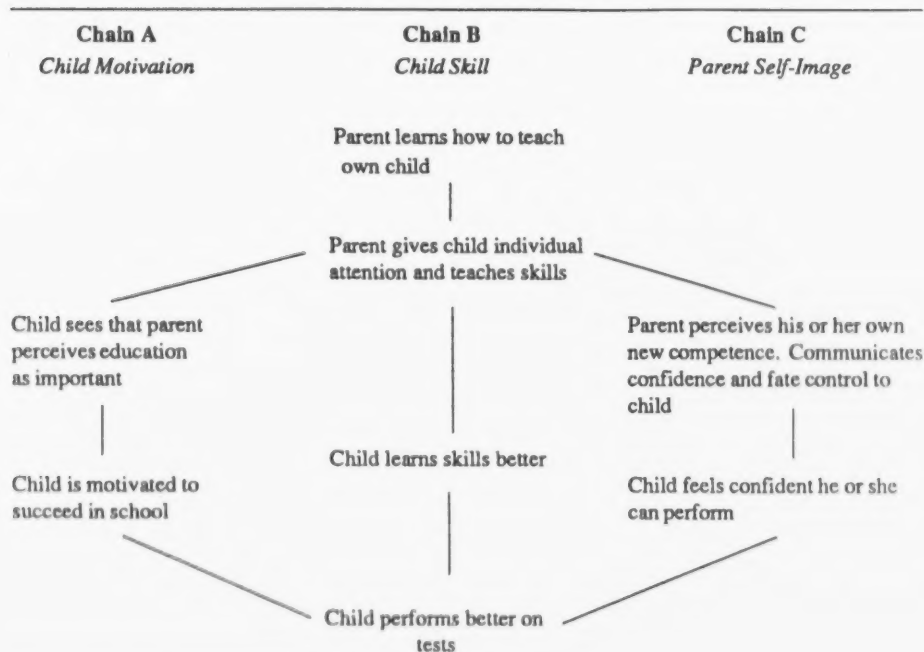
Henderson, too, found strong evidence to indicate that when parents show an interest in their children's schooling, they promote the development of *attitudes* that are key to achievement. This finding is irrespective of social class or income. If parents show an active interest in the student's work, even if they lack the academic background to help with the topics at hand, students respond with heightened interest and greater achievement. As we shall see, this finding is compatible with the social capital theory presented later in this chapter.

Multifaceted Effects of Involvement

Miriam Stearns (1973) of the Stanford Research Institute has proposed that when parents act as tutors of their children, the children perform better because of three interconnected chains of events. The chains are increased student motivation, increased student skills, and improved parent self-image. Their interrelationship is illustrated in figure 1.

As the figure demonstrates, the parent's action serves to motivate the child to work on improving his or her skills. The child's success then has a reinforcing effect on the parent. As the child's greater achievement becomes manifest, the parent grows more confident, seeing himself or herself as the cause of the child's achievement. The parent's sense of being able to control what happens (rather than being a victim of fate) is, in turn, reflected back to the child, who comes to the realization that he can be successful by application of his own efforts and is therefore motivated to continue his efforts.

Figure 1: Parents as Learners and as Tutors of Their Own Children



Source: Stearns (1973)

Training Parents to Assist Their Children

Some educators and researchers have reasoned that if parent involvement helps children to achieve, perhaps an effort to train parents in the best ways to assist their children could bring about even higher levels of achievement. One of the first research efforts in this area was that of Ronald Gillum and colleagues (1977), who studied the effect on students' reading achievement when parents were involved in the process. The best results were found in the district in which parents of participating students received inservice education on how they could assist their children in achieving project objectives, and where parents and teachers worked together as a team. Also, the district provided inservice education to parents and teachers, emphasizing the development of basic skills for participating students. Parents were assigned with selected teachers to a schedule of meetings through the year. Parents were paid a "stipend" for attendance at these meetings and received a bonus payment equivalent to the achievement gains of their children. The bonus payments were in the form of vouchers redeemable for purchases of educational materials. When parents participated in deciding what was taught and had responsibility for working with the teacher and children, student achievement was greater.

In a survey of studies of group instructional methods, Benjamin Bloom (1984), too, points to the value of training parents. In the most effective instructional method, a group of parents met with a parent educator for about two hours twice a month for six months. During the meetings, the educator made a presentation to the parents on a topic about improving the home environment, and then the parents discussed what they could do at home to support their children's learning in the school. This reaffirms a statement by George Mayeske and others (1973) that

the joint educational influence of family and school could be increased as a result of initiatives from the school. In particular, parents need to know the kinds of activity and behavior that are likely to enhance a child's school performance.

In a complementary study, reported by Annette Breiling (1976), the Montgomery County, Maryland, school district initiated a series of meetings for parents of children in kindergarten through fourth grade. Parents were given books and asked to help their children read for ten minutes at night. Homemade reading games were used to supplement reading skills. She states that "many parents report that their children increase their interest in reading merely as a result of their parents coming to meetings to learn more about reading."

Intensive involvement of parents in all aspects of the educative process is a goal of the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP), described by Dennis Revicki (1981). The program attempts to assist parents in improving home teaching behavior and to create a home environment that facilitates learning. The results of a study that involved 321 second-grade children and their families from two PEFTP programs indicate that active parent involvement was related to improved student achievement, performance, and self-concept.

Conclusion

An appropriate finale to this section is the findings of a report by the National Committee for Students in Education (see "Parent Involvement Increases Success" 1988). The committee came to the following conclusions:

- The family provides the primary educational environment.
- Involving parents in their children's education improves student achievement.
- Parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long-lasting and well-planned.
- The benefits are not confined to early childhood or the elementary level—strong effects come from involving parents continuously through high school.

- Involving parents in their own children's education at home is not enough.
- To ensure quality of schools as institutions serving the community, parents must be involved at all levels.

The general picture emerging from the research is that parental involvement engenders a positive attitude toward school by the child, and this attitude, in turn, increases the student's academic achievement. This achievement translates into higher standardized test scores, which in the popular eye are what show that the schools in the district are "doing their job." And, of course, one of the things progressive schools are doing is getting the parents involved to reinforce and assist in the acquisition of knowledge and attitudes that occurs in the classroom. As Edward McDill and others (1969) state, "School and home environments which are mutually reinforcing are likely to achieve greater academic growth of students than those lacking such consistency."

With such mutual reinforcement, there is no question whether achievement occurs but rather who should receive credit for the achievement. A statement by George Mayeske and his colleagues (1973) answers that question and presents a rationale from which schools might operate:

A large part of achievement can be associated with family background and a large part with school characteristics, but these two large parts overlap considerably and there is no way to discover whether the overlap really should be associated with the family or with the school. . . . [but] the joint educational influence of family and school could be increased as a result of initiatives from the school. In particular, parents need to know the kinds of activity and behavior that are likely to enhance a child's school performance.

In sum, the research findings overwhelmingly indicate that parents, in partnership with schools, can assist in the academic achievement of their children. Next we turn to a discussion of the social capital theory, which provides a framework for seeing how parental involvement helps students regardless of the academic level attained by the parents.

Parent Involvement as Social Capital

An interesting perspective on how the social values of the home may interact with those of the school to contribute to (or prevent) student achievement is offered by James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer (1987). They suggest that when the school community forms around a particular ideal (such as religion), there is created a "functional community" in the school. The presence of community matters more for some families than for others. When the family, community, and school share ideas of what constitutes success in school, student achievement and retention are enhanced. Like-

wise, McDill and others (1969) found that the more norms and values regarding academic excellence in the school are shared by the parents and thus the community or neighborhood served by the school, the more likely the school is to develop an atmosphere that encourages students to higher achievement and educational aspirations. This may be because a "social capital" that has value for a young person's development is found in the functional community. How does this concept of social capital relate to education?

Human Capital and Social Capital

It is important to distinguish, say Coleman and Hoffer, between human capital and social capital, both of which exist in a family. In terms of education, *human capital* means the educational background or the amount of school knowledge that is held by either parents or children. *Social capital* is the interaction that occurs between people, such as between parents and their children. Although research indicates that student achievement correlates to the educational backgrounds (human capital) of the parents, Coleman and Hoffer contend that

this human capital can be irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents are not an important part of their children's lives, if their human capital is employed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home. . . . That is, if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount, of human capital.

For example, they say that in one public school district where school texts were purchased by the family, school authorities found that a number of Asian immigrant families purchased two copies of each textbook: one would be used by the student, but the other was for the mother so she could study in order to maximally help her child do well in school. In this example, the human capital of the parents (as measured by years of schooling) was low, but the social capital was extremely high. In contrast is the family that has well-educated parents (high human capital) who do not intellectually interact with their children (low social capital). Coleman and Hoffer label this lack of interaction a "functional deficiency" in the family. In such a family whatever human capital exists in the parents does not benefit the children because the social capital is missing.

Coleman and Hoffer postulate that the importance of social capital has long been overlooked.

What is ordinarily meant by a disadvantaged background is the absence of resources embodied in the parents, primarily represented by parents' education but also represented by a low economic level or racial-ethnic minority status that stand as surrogates for low levels of human capital that is useful for economic success. . . . What we have counterposed to that in identifying "deficient families" is the absence of social capital, the weakness of links

between the adult members of the family and the children.

They illustrate the interaction of social and human capital in a chart reproduced in figure 2. In cell 1 are families rich in both human and social capital; the educational backgrounds of the parents are relevant to the children's academic achievement because of their interaction with the children.

Cell 2 represents the well-educated parents who don't interact with their children. Coleman and Hoffer state that "for a variety of reasons—divorce, involvement with other adults in relations that do not cross generations, exclusive attention to self-development—the resources of the adults are not available to aid the psychological health and the social and educational development of the children." Various studies indicate that this type of family is becoming more prevalent today, and it is not a phenomenon

Figure 2: Families Characterized by Presence or Absence of Human Capital and Social Capital

		<i>Social Capital</i> (strong vs. deficient families)	
		Yes	No
<i>Human Capital</i> (traditional advantage of background)	Yes	1	2
	No	3	4

Source: Coleman and Hoffer (1987)

limited to any particular socioeconomic group. While cell 2 might bring images of the professional couple pursuing their own goals, even parents on welfare can fit here. As one teacher told me,

It is difficult to get the parents in this area [low SES, many single parent households, transient population] involved in the school and their kid's education. They always have something to do: work on the car, fix something in the house, prepare for a hunting or fishing trip. As a result they feel they don't have time to be involved in education, unless there is a problem with the child at school.

In cell 3 are families such as the Asians mentioned above. Their strong social capital makes up for a deficiency of human capital. Finally, cell 4, lacking both human and social capital, represents families "that are poor,

uneducated, and disorganized, structurally broken or weakened by the personal disorganization of the parent or parents."

Because of the importance of social capital, the authors believe that young persons need to become embedded in relationships with adults most proximate to them—families and a surrounding community of adults. When this community reinforces what is presented in school, students are more likely to see the two environments as integral and related parts of their life experience. They should be less inclined to "drop out" of school, since that would mean removing themselves from one arena of activity that they share with members of their community. When there is an obvious link between the school and the community, the reinforcement between the two is apparently stronger. Coleman and Hoffer cite data showing that where there was religious participation by students and families (not only Catholics) in Catholic schools and in non-Catholic private schools, the probability of dropping out was lower.

Strategies to Increase Social Capital

If an increase in social capital can have such a powerful effect on students' achievement and persistence in school, the obvious question is, What can those involved with students do to increase social capital? Parents, principals, teachers, and superintendents can all play a role.

Parents. Parents can take a direct approach by becoming more involved with their children's education. Coleman and Hoffer go so far as to suggest that this might mean the parents should place their children in a different type of school—one with a functional community that will reinforce the values of the home. Referring back to figure 1 (Stearns' diagram), another alternative may be possible. If the parents become more active as tutors of their children, they immediately increase social capital (and their own self-esteem). Furthermore, by increasing their own self-esteem, they are more likely to become involved in other school activities, thus contributing to Coleman and Hoffer's concept of a functional community. This would then tend to cycle back to a greater correspondence between home and school expectations, either because the parents are influencing community values or because the school and its community values are being absorbed by the more involved parents. Whatever the reason, the student is increasingly aware that he or she does not oscillate between two different worlds, but rather moves between environments having similar goals and expectations, though they differ in personnel and approach.

Principals. The school environment itself, however, can be autonomously manipulated to maximize social capital. The principal as instructional leader can influence the degree and kind of social interaction. In the effort to promote a greater degree of interaction among the students, Coleman and Hoffer believe that the principal has two goals:

to have a student body sufficiently integrated and cohesive that it constitutes social capital which can be a force in the lives of students; and to direct that force toward, rather than away from, education.

This force can be cultivated by schoolwide events, such as interscholastic sports, music competitions, and debates. The school can also give public recognition to the winners of scholastic events just as it may do for winners of sports events. According to a survey by Henry Becker and Joyce Epstein (1982), principals generally support the concept of parental involvement, and nearly three out of five report they have held staff meetings or workshops during the school year that focused on methods for helping parents work with their children at home.

Teachers. Another important aspect of social capital in the schools is the relationship between teacher and students. The quality of this relationship depends on the teacher having enough time to interact with each student, facilitated by a lower teacher-student ratio or the presence of teacher aides. As the teacher becomes more aware of the student's needs, more individualized work can be assigned and a cooperative program developed between home and school. When problems arise, parents and teachers can confer, each being aware of the environment within which the other works with the child. If there has been some tutoring by the parent, there is common ground for discussion. Indirectly, the child is aware that significant adults are interested in his or her progress, and this awareness encourages a positive attitude toward learning.

Practice may lag behind theory, however. Becker and Epstein's survey of 3,700 public elementary school teachers revealed that, although the teachers had a positive view of parent-oriented teaching strategies, "only a minority of teachers initiate interaction with parents that go beyond what is traditionally expected of them," such as notes sent home, conferences, and so forth. Similar lack of initiative by teachers is evident in research findings of the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University ("Ideas for Involving Parents" 1988):

Although most parents want to be involved with their children's school work, many say they would like to have more guidance and ideas from teachers. Likewise, most teachers believe parent participation is important, but many do not know how to involve parents. . . . Only one-fourth of the parents interviewed said they frequently were involved in home learning activities.

Part of the problem may be because teachers have preconceptions of what to expect if they were to initiate contact with parents. Becker and Epstein found that many of the written comments of teachers

reinforced common stereotypes of parents—"pushy" upper-middle class parents, "helpful" middle-class parents, and "incapable" lower-class parents.

Becker and Epstein suggest that it is important that teachers initiate personal contact. By so doing they will be able to develop the commitment of parents. They found that when teachers visited the homes of their students, they were more likely to be favorable toward parent-involvement techniques.

Superintendents. At the district level, superintendents have spearheaded communitywide efforts to stimulate parent involvement in the schools. This has taken the form of ensuring that there is an active PTA or building coalitions or partnerships that involve a cross-section of parents. But these activities, although helpful, do not directly involve parents in their children's educational programs. Some districts have gone further by requesting that the PTA provide funds for allowing teachers and parents to attend workshops for training in specific school-home programs (such as Family Math) or by providing funds for the purchase of materials that are used at home to reinforce and extend the curriculum (such as Reading Is Fundamental).

The next chapter explores the ways that schools at different levels have involved parents. In some cases the initiative came from the school or the district, but in others it was the parents who organized and began programs for their children.

Parental Involvement through the Grades

Most efforts to involve parents in education focus on the elementary grades. Programs do exist for preschool children and their parents, however, and some programs can be found in the high schools. This chapter's descriptions of these programs relies on both printed materials and interviews with educators who operate the programs.

Programs at the Preschool Level

Formal schooling usually begins with kindergarten or grade 1, but unstructured education is recognized as being operative at the home from the birth of the child. For increasing numbers of students a structured learning environment known as preschool is becoming a common introduction to the academic world. Parental involvement in preschool programs can be very pronounced and highly effective. As early as 1977, the Austin Independent School District found that

the involvement of parents of low socio-economic status children in the educational process has a positive influence on the children's academic achievement. . . . At the preschool level, studies in which parents were instructed concerning methods of promoting their children's intellectual development were found to be particularly successful in producing long-term improvements in the academic achievement of low SES children.

A study by Ralph Scott and Arthur Davis (reviewed by Henderson) indicates that in a Head Start Program in Waterloo, Iowa, disadvantaged children who participated in a three-year preschool enrichment program with strong parent involvement remained more advanced in basic skills through the third grade, when compared to their older siblings. In a longitudinal

study of Project HOPE (Home-Oriented Preschool Education) by E.E. Gotts, (also reported by Henderson), children aged 3-5 whose parents were trained (by paraprofessionals, in the home) to augment daily lessons broadcast on television showed consistently higher achievement through the first few years of their school careers than did children who received only TV lessons and especially more than those who did not have any structured preschool. Assessments were made five and seven years after completion of the program. Of equal importance was the finding that the parents rated higher in an assessment of "the role of caring for and nurturing the child toward psychosocial maturity."

In Oregon, where preschool is not part of the state system of education, programs for preschool children may be initiated by a variety of agents: day care centers, preschools, churches, groups of parents in a particular community, and so forth. Two programs that have received attention are the Mommy and Me Program in Pendleton and Parents of Pre-Schoolers in Hermiston. Both were started outside of schools and have somewhat different purposes.

Mommy and Me

Sue Skeen, coordinator of Pendleton's Mommy and Me program for children age 5 and below, said the focus of this group is not the children per se, but the parents. Its two main purposes are to provide a support group for mothers of preschoolers and to teach mothering skills to those who feel they need some assistance.

The group meets twice a month, and during the sessions areas are set up for the children to do various things, such as make crafts, cook, go for walks together, and show their toys. The mothers meet together to discuss discipline, nutrition, and other topics related to raising children. Three times during the year they arrange for special speakers, such as a fireman or the kindergarten teacher, to talk with the group. The focus of the group is on interaction, not academics. They believe it is more important for preschoolers (and their parents) to acquire social skills than it is for them to acquire academic skills. Mommy and Me is a successful program as judged by the verbal comments Sue Skeen receives from parents who participate and by the observable differences in the way the children interact with each other. After a few months in the program, they tend to be less fearful and to relate to others more easily.

Parents of Pre-Schoolers

Hermiston's preschool group is based on a Denver, Colorado, program called Mothers of Pre-Schoolers, says Tammy Manning, program coordinator. A local church, believing that the children needed something to do and that parents needed a support group, helped to affiliate a group of interested

mothers with the Denver organization. The group later decided to adapt the program to its own needs and named it POPS (Parents of Pre-Schoolers) with the intent of involving both mothers and fathers.

The size of the group has varied from a high of twenty a few years ago to about eight last year. At monthly meetings, parents listen to presentations on topics related to child rearing or childhood education. For example, the principal may speak about what to expect when children start school. There are also activity days when parents and their children work together on various activities and may continue the project at home if not finished at the meeting. During the year, parents take topics on a rotating basis and develop them for teaching the children. For example, when the alphabet was the theme, a parent who did the letter "C" talked about cowboys. The group camped out and rode horses. For "F," they visited a fish hatchery. Parents who felt they were not good at teaching developed some of the most interesting topics. Fathers as well as mothers took part in some of the presentations. Evaluation of the program is informal and is very positive.

Involvement of Schools

Recognizing that early parental involvement in their children's education has both short- and long-term benefits, many professional educators, as the above examples show, are cooperating with locally formed groups of parents. When administrators and teachers lend their expertise to these groups in the form of presentations or helping with activities for the children, they add a professional dimension to the community programs. Their participation also lets parents know what to expect when their children enter formal education, not so much in terms of the subject matter, but rather the school's approach to teaching. Moreover, parents who establish an informal relationship with teachers and administrators in this preschool setting are more likely to be actively involved in their children's education after they enter school.

Although preschools are not part of compulsory education, ESDs have been involved with children of this age group in the area of special education. Rosemary French, child development specialist for early childhood programs for the Umatilla ESD, works with families having children who are under five years old. In addition to conducting training classes and meeting with parents of children with special needs, she consults with both the Mommy and Me and the Parents of Pre-Schoolers groups. She also consults with parents who call the ESD for information or advice.

Parental Involvement in Elementary and Middle Schools

Parents of elementary school children are noticeably more involved with their children's schools than are parents of older students. To be sure,

much of this involvement has not been directly related to the child's academic work. Instead, it has centered on attendance at meetings, fundraising events, contacts with school staff, volunteer work in the schools, and participation in decision-making as members of boards or committees. Nevertheless, this traditional pattern of involvement is beginning to give way to a new effort to involve parents in the educational process.

One district that has actively sought parent participation is the Springfield (Oregon) School District. Springfield has an active PTA whose coordinating council helps to guide the district. In the past, parents have been academically active in the schools, but their involvement has been arranged on an individual basis by the building administrators. This year one of the district's ten goals is to develop a districtwide parent education process. The program will be designed so that parents can be trained to help at home with the education of their children. This districtwide course has been set along a path charted by a number of schools in the district.

Moffitt Elementary School

Wendell Walmsley, principal of Springfield's Moffitt Elementary, actively seeks to get the children's parents involved in the school programs and in educating their children at home. The school's attendance area includes a preponderance of low-income families—many are on welfare and are led by single parents—and a higher than average mobility rate. In the face of these apparent obstacles, Walmsley is proud of getting a 95 percent turnout of parents at the parent-teacher conferences that are conducted twice each year. However, he is also concerned that many parents think they are too busy with their own affairs to be involved at school. There is, of course, a consistent but small group of committed parents who find that they get an increasing workload as the year progresses. And many parents are pleased to come to school and work as aides and supervisors for field trips. For some parents, working at Moffitt has motivated them to enroll at Lane Community College to complete requirements for the high school diploma they never received.

Because Walmsley would like to see more parents directly involved in the academic programs of their children, he has introduced two programs—one in reading and the other in math—to foster this involvement. (Both of these nationwide programs, Reading Is Fundamental and Family Math, are described in more detail in chapter 3). By corresponding with the families and having teachers make direct contact with parents of children who would benefit from enrichment or remediation in these areas, the school has attempted to bring parents into the academic picture.

Reading Is Fundamental. The PTA has provided financial support for RIF while individual parents have become home monitors of their children's reading. The money raised by the PTA was matched on a 1:4 ratio

by a federal grant the school received. Parents help by setting aside some time each day for recreational reading for the children and for themselves. With the funds provided, a committee selects and orders books for distribution to the children. Parents encourage their children to read the materials and use forms provided by the school to keep track of the time their children spend reading. Youngsters who read for a specified time over a two-week period get to enter their names in the Moffitt RIF Reader drawing. The student whose name is drawn will receive ten books and a Moffitt T-shirt and hat. The winner's name is entered in a national drawing that is held in Washington, D.C. to select the National RIF Reader and ten runners-up. At Moffitt, there is a drawing at each grade level for T-shirts.

The program has been well received. Some families who move out of the area make a special trip to Moffitt to pick up the packet of books for their child. Although a formal evaluation of the program has not been conducted at Moffitt, staff members believe it is successful because students are enthusiastic about getting the books, and they do read them. Students in the program are also given books to read during the summer, and teachers believe that this reduces the loss of reading skills that is usually expected to occur during the summer months.

Family Math. Moffitt has found it more difficult to get families to participate in the Family Math program. Nevertheless, some teachers are using it to augment their classroom programs and finding that it helps students who have a high level of math anxiety. Parents who do become involved are usually quite enthusiastic. The school's primary problem has been attracting families. Initially, Walmsley sent letters to parents informing them about the math program and inviting them to an orientation and first session. Enrollment was going to be decided on a first-come, first-served basis. However, the response was so poor that all who applied were accommodated. For example, of the 150 parents who were invited to the grades 1 and 2 session, only about 10 came. Some who came for the first meeting did not come for others. "Apparently those who did not return expected to be shown how to help their children master the multiplication tables, and were not prepared for the manipulative and problem-solving approach Family Math employs," explained Penny Kimball, a grade 2 classroom teacher.

Kimball went to Portland for training, and then introduced Family Math to the other teachers and the community. The PTA was also invited to send a parent representative to the training sessions, but no one was available to go. She conducted the introductory sessions for teachers who wanted to try the program, and then for parents and children who wanted to participate. She explained that Walmsley was very supportive, and some parents and teachers became very excited about the program.

Glenna Johnson, the grade 5 teacher at Moffitt, is one of the enthusiasts. She heard about the program from Kimball and wanted to try it with

students in the "low" math group who weren't motivated by grades or promises of additional credit for work done. As the students responded enthusiastically, she eventually began using the program for the whole math period on Fridays. The intent of Family Math is to have parents and children doing the problems together at home. However, because the parent interest was so low, there was not much carryover into the home.

This year Moffitt is hoping to generate more parent interest in the Family Math program by demonstrating it at the annual open house. After the demonstration there will be the opportunity to sign up for the workshop sessions. Because feedback from students and parents who participated in last year's program has been so positive, teachers have already received some inquiries about what will be done this year, and expect much greater parent involvement.

Centennial Elementary School

In contrast to Moffitt, Springfield's Centennial Elementary School does not have parental involvement in specific subject areas, but tries to identify students who are having problems across the curriculum. Jim Lewis, counselor at Centennial, explains that a teacher contacts the parents by phone and informs them that their child needs some assistance in certain academic or behavioral areas. If no improvement occurs within a reasonable time, the parents are asked to come for a conference. During the conference a program of school-home cooperation designed to address the problem area is set up. Daily notes are then sent from school to home so that parents are aware of their child's progress. This might go on for several months. The record of work accomplished or of behavior change is kept in a special file so that at parent-teacher conferences the parents can be shown what progress is being made.

Occasionally, when a student's performance is deficient in areas taught by a number of different teachers, the staff may hold multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings. These may be held monthly and are attended by all school personnel involved in that student's education. Thus, the class teacher, librarian, music teacher, playground aide, or specialist teachers can assess what improvement is being made across the curriculum. In some instances, as many as fifteen teachers are in attendance.

Some teachers have individual techniques that they find effective. For example, one teacher instructs individual parents in how to teach the child at home. This is used with carefully selected families, since some parents don't feel comfortable in that role, and some students feel there is too much pressure being put on them and respond negatively. A technique used by another teacher is to keep the students after school on a scheduled basis to do remedial work or to have a conference about how they are doing. When they are finished, she drives them home.

Some teachers prefer not to work with the parents because it demands additional time for preparation, monitoring, and feedback. But as there are usually only two or three students per class who need extensive attention, most teachers are fully supportive of what they consider to be an effective program.

Response from parents has also been mixed. Some parents say they want to participate in such a program, but don't continue after an initial period. Some parents become defensive when told that a child is not doing well in school. A typical response might be, "There's no problem at home, why are you having problems at school? You deal with it." However, this type of response is the exception. Lewis believes that attitude may be more of a reflection of a parent who is overwhelmed by other problems. In fact, he believes that 75-80 percent of the parents want to help, and some of those expect too much from their children. The remainder may not participate because they lack financial resources and are under a great deal of stress.

Overall, the programs implemented by teachers at Centennial are successful, but because they are not coordinated building-wide, they may not be continued when the child advances to the next grade. This lack of continuity may be due in part to the fact that different teachers employ different strategies or use different teaching styles. However, in some cases it is the result of success—that is, cooperative efforts between home and school have been successful to the point where the child no longer requires the close monitoring or the extra work that originally necessitated the program.

Briggs Middle School

Yet another approach to school-home cooperation was pursued last year at Briggs Middle School in Springfield. Ellie Smit, counselor at the school, was responsible for establishing the Parent Project program. This program uses a parent educator and a therapist (hired with the assistance of grant funds) to deal directly with parents of students who had been identified as "at risk." The teachers contacted the parents of these students and followed up the initial contact with a letter sent to the home. Parents were again reminded at parent-teacher conference time. Since the financial resources of many of these families were limited, the school provided child care. Five evening classes were offered to the parents, followed by four followup sessions. Of seventy-five parents initially contacted, twenty-five attended the first meeting. Ten parents completed the program.

During the presentations, information about adolescent development was provided and parents were given some suggestions about how to become more actively involved in their child's life. The emphasis was on development and relationships and on factors that influence students of middle school age, not on training parents to be tutors. The parents who participated felt that the program was very useful and informative. Smit explains that it is

difficult to assess results but believes it had a positive impact on the families that attended. Unfortunately, there is no funding for the program this year, but if there was, they would like to attract a larger, more varied group of parents.

Duniway Elementary School

Allen Luethe, principal of Duniway Elementary School, said there is no organized plan for parental involvement at the school. However, a few years ago the school set a number of goals, one of which was to encourage parents and school personnel to work together more closely for the education of the children. But from that has come a great deal of involvement that is overseen by the principal. Syllabi of subject areas are printed and distributed to parents so that they can monitor and assist the children. Parents who have expertise in certain areas come into school and "teach" the children about those areas. Other parents come to school to tutor students or help supervise field trips. There are also volunteers who help with the phoning and other clerical duties.

Recruitment of volunteers starts at the beginning of the school year when the principal asks teachers to make a list of parents who would like to help at school, what they would like to assist with, and the time of day they are available (mornings, afternoons, or evenings). A great number of parents respond, and they are willing to participate in a wide variety of areas. Parents have made presentations about their respective careers. They have helped to edit books that the children have written for publication. (Last year some 2,000 such books were published). Parents have also formed an "Applied Arts" group that instructs students in all grade levels. Last year seventy-two parents accompanied eighty-two first graders on an overnight trip. On another trip they helped to carve pumpkins.

Most teachers are enthusiastic about parent participation. This is not surprising in that when there are applicants for an opening, Luethe asks teachers how they would use parents to help in the classroom. He seeks those who will foster active participation. In the K-5 school, the participation is well spread, but the primary grades (K-2) have proportionally more parents involved. Teachers are encouraged to get as much participation as possible, and some teachers have every parent participating. Last year parents contributed more than 10,000 volunteer hours at Duniway.

Although there has been no formal evaluation of the effects of parental involvement, Luethe says he has noticed a positive change in attitude in school.

Parents are happier. They feel that they are an integral part of the school. The kids are happier. There have been increases in achievement, but we did not attempt to analyze that in detail.

He feels that during the five years he has been at Duniway, each year has been better than the preceding one.

Luethe believes that more schools are becoming aware of the importance of parental involvement. Funding from the district and the reputation of the schools depend on the image they have with the public. By cultivating community involvement, schools make the community aware of what they are doing and how well they are doing it.

Portland's Alameda Elementary School

Alameda Elementary School in the Portland School District has won national recognition for its parent involvement program. Chuck Nakvasil, principal, speaks very proudly and highly of the involvement of the parents of Alameda's students. Not only are the parents active on the PTA and serve on the local school advisory committee, but the school has the highest number of parent volunteers in the district. They assist with clerical tasks, serve as escorts for the school buses, get involved raising funds for school projects, and are directly involved with teaching students.

Active involvement does not just happen. Nakvasil emphasizes the importance of reaching out to parents. Administrators must work at getting parents involved and must feel very comfortable working with them. It is also important that parents understand that their role is to provide input and service, but that final decision-making rests with the administration. After parents make a commitment to volunteer in the school they receive training in the fall for the work that they will be doing during the year.

The homework policy at Alameda is designed to ensure school-home cooperation. Teachers may send home newsletters that describe class projects to parents and ask them to oversee what the children will be doing and to assist them in various ways. Parents are informed about the homework policy on Back to School Night, and it is also outlined in the school handbook. If a parent perceives that a child has a problem, then he or she should contact the school so school and home can work together. Most teachers are very happy to involve parents. In fact, when prospective teachers are being interviewed for a position, Nakvasil makes it a point to ask how they feel about parental involvement, and he will favor candidates who support such an approach.

A lot of initiative for parental involvement at Alameda comes from the parents. There have also been parent meetings dealing with curriculum, and some parents are pleased to assist with curriculum innovation. Admittedly not all schools are like that. Nakvasil said that ten years ago, when he was in a lower socioeconomic status (SES) school in Portland, 98 percent of the initiative had to come from the administration and staff. He feels that lower-SES populations expect (and need) more input from the school. But once a core of such parents is formed, it can continue on its own. If the core group

is composed primarily of parents of students in the lower grades, they will be there for a number of years, and will be able to continue the group and attract other new parents.

With such active volunteers and an interactive homework policy, it is not surprising that Alameda also has a Family Math program and will be starting Family Science. The comprehensive program of parental involvement has greatly contributed to a better school environment as well as to the academic achievement of the students. Nakvasil said, "When students see their parents involved in the school, they imitate their parents' behavior and become 'successful' in school." And although there has not been a formal evaluation of the parental involvement program, members of the school community believe that there has been a great change for the better in the school over the past few years.

Parental Involvement in the High School

While parental involvement in elementary and middle schools is both remote and proximate to the child's academic program, parental influence at high school is essentially removed from direct involvement with academics. However, the home environment and the degree of parental involvement with school activities does influence student achievement in school. Anne Henderson, reviewing a study by Sanford Dornbusch, states that the most important family background variable affecting high school students' grades is parent education, and an important family behavior influencing grades is the degree of parental participation in such school functions as Open School Nights. This factor is important regardless of the parents' own educational attainment.

Another important factor is the reaction of parents to grades. In another study by Dornbusch (again reviewed by Henderson), he and his coauthors classified parenting styles as authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarians tell their children not to argue with or question adults, punish children for poor grades, and respond to good grades with instructions to do even better. Permissive parents seem indifferent to grades whether poor or good, do not stress working hard, establish no rules about watching television, and are not involved in education either at home or at school. Authoritative parents tell children to look at both sides of an issue and admit that kids sometimes know more. They talk about family politics and encourage all family members to participate in decisions; they respond to good grades with praise, to bad grades with some restrictions and offers of help and encouragement. Henderson states:

Across ethnic groups, education levels and family structures, the authors consistently found that authoritarian parenting was associated with the

lowest grades, permissive parenting with the next lowest, and authoritative with the highest grades. Inconsistent parenting, or switching from one style to the other, is also strongly associated with low grades.

Although there are some interesting variations among ethnic groups (Hispanic females react very negatively to authoritarian parenting, while Hispanic males do not), the primary finding is that parenting style, or variations in family processes, is a more powerful predictor of student achievement than parent education, ethnicity, or family structure.

The above studies were conducted in San Francisco on nearly 8,000 students in 6 high schools. Also responding were about 300 teachers and 3,500 parents.

In his study of the educational climates of high schools, Edward McDill and coauthors selected by random sample 20 public high schools in 8 states and then sent questionnaires to more than 20,000 students, 1000 faculty members, and all 20 principals. Based on questionnaire responses, the authors concluded that the degree of parental and community interest in quality education and in the students' academic performance is the critical factor in explaining the impact of the high school environment on the achievement and educational aspirations of students. In a statement that recalls the ideas of Coleman and Hoffer elaborated in the previous chapter, McDill and his colleagues contend that the more the norms and values regarding academic excellence are shared by the parents in the community, the more likely the school is to develop an atmosphere that encourages students to adopt higher achievement and educational aspirations. The authors stated that

highly consistent home environments have more potent effects on cognitive development than those lacking internal consistency. School and home environments which are mutually reinforcing are likely to achieve greater academic growth of students than those lacking such consistency.

McDill and colleagues conclude by quoting former U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe:

In all communities . . . the principal needs to take the initiative in tailoring his school to the character of the community. He needs to solicit parent participation and to help parents understand what kind of contributions they can make. The principal ought to be welcoming parents and letting them see how the school is run and explain to them its policies and programs. He should at the same time be converting the school into a community resource

The above studies indicate that secondary schools can raise student achievement by getting parents involved. The findings also dispell the myth that parents of secondary students are unable to assist their children with academic work because the academics are beyond them. What is necessary at the secondary level is direct participation by the parents in which they dem-

onstrate an interest in what the schools are doing for their children.

Across the country several high schools have developed programs that encourage this kind of direct participation. For instance, New York City's Middle College High School, an alternative school known for its innovative approaches to dropout prevention, formed a Parent Support Group after speakers from a local residential center for troubled teenagers proposed alternative methods parents could adopt in dealing with their children. Twice each month, report Douglas Berman and colleagues (1987), two school counselors meet with parents of students who want assistance in dealing with the difficulties they are encountering. During its initial stages the group identified needs and asked counselors to arrange for guest speakers who could address topics the group members felt were most important. Presentations ranged from topics directly related to parent-child relationships (effective communication, teenage lifestyles, letting go, college preparation, and so forth) to more general concerns such as sexuality and sex roles, managing finances, work, and ambitions.

With the guidance of the counselors, the parents came together under the auspices of the school. After about a year of operation, eight to ten parents continue to meet regularly. Others come when they can and communicate with counselors more than they did before. Teenagers often encourage their parents to attend the group meetings. It is reported that many teens are showing a pattern of improvement in behavior, attendance, and grades. But as Berman reports, "It is not a steady pattern, but more like a crash diet, with sudden spurts of achievement and then periods of regression as stresses, peer pressure, and force of habit bring students back to their familiar ways." When there are disappointments and failures, the group supports its members and helps them not to lose sight of progress.

Involving parents more directly in their children's academic programs is the goal of Green Mountain Union High School's homework policy. Joseph Bonfiglio (1988) reports that this Chester, Vermont, school asked each department to develop a homework policy statement. For example, the English department's statement began, "Developmental reading students are assigned 20-25 minutes of homework a night with ongoing guided and independent reading." The science department outlined the requirements of a good lab report, and the business department stressed keeping a notebook of vocabulary words. Parents, teachers, and students are given objectives to work toward. The parents' role is summarized as follows:

1. Parents have the opportunity to get directly involved in and informed about the material students are studying.
2. Parents provide students with an environment that promotes good study habits.
3. Parents are an extension of the formal educational system and enrich the students' learning through their support and encouragement.

The teachers felt the homework policy created a framework for a productive,

positive interaction among administrators, board members, students, and parents.

John R. Ban (1987) proposes yet another approach—discipline literacy. He believes that parents are alienated by schools' inertia in bringing them into the mainstream of education. A way to remedy the situation is to involve them in a topic that gets constant attention in the media. He contends that the way schools inform parents about their social control structure "amounts to a one-time shot in the arm that is intended to immunize parents against the virus of illiteracy." These "shots" may take the form of open houses, single workshops, newsletters, or widely circulated discipline codes. But "parents cannot become discipline literate in a couple of hours or by reading material sent home." He suggests that principals support a comprehensive study of school discipline through a long-term, interactive, inservice program for parents and led by parents. This would give parents "a substantive role in the schools." It would benefit the schools because a discipline literate citizenry will draw the school and home closer together in influencing the behavior of children and produce stronger support for public education.

The belief that parent involvement in high schools produces a climate of shared responsibility for student learning is echoed by James A. Sandfort (1987):

Schools in which parents are partners stand in stark contrast to those in which the school assumes sole responsibility for student learning or the school in which parents serve as volunteers only.

When parents are more than volunteers, there is a direct and extended contact between parent and professional, a focus on the individual child, and a fundamental concern with instruction as opposed to general welfare programs.

Sandfort cites the results of a survey conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory:

Parents and teachers agreed on the value of providing parents with ideas to help children at home with homework.

Parents wanted teachers to send more work home related to classroom activities

Parents were interested in learning about their role as co-learner and tutor.

It is Sandfort's belief that when parents get involved, they reverse their "turn over" psychology and once again "own" the responsibility for both rearing and educating their children.

Summary

The programs described in this chapter support the idea that the involvement of parents in the academic programs of their children has a posi-

tive effect on their achievement levels. Support groups for parents of preschoolers; parental cooperation with academic programs in math, reading, and science at the elementary schools; and group support and academic involvement of parents at middle and high school levels all indicate that students' academic achievement is enhanced when their parents become involved in their education.

Even though parents want to be involved, few will take the initiative to approach schools. At the same time, many educators assume that parents are either not inclined or not qualified to contribute to their children's academic education. At present, the initial contact for cooperation usually comes from teachers who are concerned about the progress of students in their respective subjects or classes. A growing number of principals, too, aware of the value of parent involvement, are encouraging and promoting programs to foster interaction. The next chapter focuses on some programs that have been effective in initiating and maintaining home-school academic interaction.

Two Academic Programs That Involve Parents

In the preceding chapter reference was made to two academic programs—Reading Is Fundamental and Family Math—that are being used in the schools. Both programs are seen as effective means of getting parents actively involved in the academic programs and also stimulating student interest in reading and mathematics. Both formal and informal evaluations indicate that the response of teachers, students, and parents has been enthusiastic. Teachers claim that students perform better than they did before the programs were implemented.

This chapter provides a brief overview of both programs. Additional information and materials can be obtained from the sources listed in Appendix A.

Reading Is Fundamental

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF), founded in 1966, is a nationwide nonprofit organization that works through local communities to motivate American young people to read. It gives youngsters the opportunity to select and keep books they find appealing. The program works through a network of thousands of local projects in operation in schools and communities across the nation. These projects are run largely by volunteers, including parents, educators, members of service clubs, librarians, community leaders, and others. It is purported to be effective for youngsters from three years old through high school age.

Any public agency or private, nonprofit group may apply to Reading Is Fundamental to start a project. There is a simple project proposal to fill out in which the sponsor group (school, PTA, local business, or service club) describes its plans, including how many youngsters the project will serve and

describes its plans, including how many youngsters the project will serve and the amount of money the group expects to raise. If RIF approves the proposal, the group enters into an agreement with Reading Is Fundamental to operate a twelve-month project.

The sponsoring agency provides support with volunteers, funds, and services. In some schools the PTA will help with the funding. In other communities, a corporation or groups of businessmen will assume the financial costs, which vary depending upon how many students will participate in the program. As a general guideline, if the program is operated during the school year, all students in the program will be given three books at each of three distributions. If it is a summer program, the participating students receive two books at each of two distributions. Extra books (approximately 10 percent more than needed for the number of students involved) should be added to increase the choice available. RIF recommends that an estimate of at least \$1.25 for elementary level books and \$1.50 for higher levels is appropriate. If a school wanted to involve 400 students in a summer program, for example, the calculation would be $400 \times 4 \times 1.1 = 1760$ books needed. If they are elementary students, the cost of the project is calculated as follows: $1760 \times \$1.25 = \$2,200$. Of course, the school could focus efforts on a particular grade to reduce numbers if adequate funds are not available for schoolwide implementation of the project.

A committee is established to select books. There are book distribution centers where books can be purchased very inexpensively, and a number of book companies (such as Scholastic) offer discounts up to 75 percent for selected books for RIF. The committee may place orders through the sponsoring agency or obtain funds to buy directly from local book distributors.

When the books arrive, the students make their selection. Students take the books home and parents are asked to listen to them read or to discuss with them the books they have read. Students may participate in the "In Celebration of Reading" program, where they read for a specified time over a two-week period. Parents monitor their children to encourage them and to verify that the reading has been done. Students who complete the program receive a Certificate of Participation and may enter their names in a national drawing.

At the end of each program year, a periodic report must be submitted to RIF summarizing the outcome of the project. RIF also appreciates receiving other feedback, such as samples of activities that are done as a result of the reading, or an account of any publicity the project received from local media. It is also necessary to submit a new proposal for each year that the school wishes to have a RIF project.

How effective is the program? Results indicate that more students are reading and that parents do get involved in the activity. Studies conducted in Texas and Pennsylvania show that children who have books in their homes score higher on reading tests than do those from homes without books. RIF

is specifically cited as an important factor in improving reading. In 1980 a study by researchers at the California State University at Sacramento found that RIF improves children's attitudes toward reading. RIF itself reports that volunteers in more than half of the RIF projects attest to the following:

- Youngsters spend more time reading.
- Their attitudes toward learning improve.
- Parents get involved in reading with their children.
- Often, reading scores rise and library circulation increases.

RIF offers a number of services to help schools get started. These include providing various publications, giving access to book suppliers and book discounts, offering assistance from RIF staff members, providing a tie-in to the national network, and allowing participation in a variety of special events. A ten-minute color film that shows how communities can help prevent illiteracy through RIF is also available. Further information can be obtained by writing to the address in Appendix A.

Family Math

Family Math is a program designed to teach parents how to become more effective partners in their children's mathematics learning. This is an extension of the Equals program that was developed in 1977 "to address the problem of there being so few women and minorities in math teaching and professions," explains Mary Jo Cittadino, network coordinator of EQUALS in Berkeley, California. The program works through schools, churches, and community groups. Since its beginning in 1981, it is estimated that more than 3,000 adults have been taught how to conduct Family Math classes. Sites authorized to conduct inservice sessions have been established across the country, one of which is Northwest EQUALS, established at Portland State University in 1983-84. Parents, teachers, and community leaders participate in a two-day training program. The next training session at PSU will be offered on January 20-21, 1989. The \$76 fee includes lunches and a book.

Adults attend the courses because they want to help children learn math. However, they are pleasantly surprised at how interesting and how much fun it is to participate. Peggy Noone, program specialist of Northwest EQUALS, stresses that "Family Math deals with problem solving and estimation, not just computation." Classes also discuss why people get discouraged with math, and they use games and materials to show adults how math is relevant to daily life.

Once parents and teachers get involved, they usually become very enthusiastic. Noone says that "talking to parents involved in Family Math is like talking to people at a revival meeting." And this is not because they all come in with strong math backgrounds. Some come acknowledging defi-

math every day as engineers or technicians, but want to become more proficient at translating their knowledge to their children. The program attempts to show parents that math can be fun and can be shared in the family, not just tolerated in a school setting.

The program presents activities, exercises, and puzzles aimed at developing an understanding of the math concepts taught in school. In the book are listed math topics typically covered at the various grade levels and activities that can illustrate these concepts. These are designed to develop and make relevant the sometimes abstract skills that students encounter as classroom math. When the program is used between school and home, the teacher typically covers the text material and exercises. Then the students are assigned activities in the Family Math book to do at home. These are interesting and practical math experiences, not workbook problems or worksheets.

Family Math is typically introduced into a school by an interested teacher or parent who goes to the workshop, receives initial training, and then returns to the school. There he or she conducts a session for teachers who would like to adopt the program for their math classes. Once the teachers are familiar with the approach, a workshop is conducted for the parents and their children. The workshops may be conducted for specific grades; for example, one session for parents and students of grades 1 and 2 and another for grades 3 to 5.

In Kelso Elementary School in Boring, Oregon, Principal Mary Smith has had the program in operation for the past two years and will continue it this year. She said that she and one-third of her teachers have undergone the training and are very enthusiastic. Two parents were also trained and assist with the program. The common remark of parents who do the program with their children is, "I didn't know math could be so much fun." Smith observed that both kids and parents lose "math phobia." Although the school has not formally evaluated the program, parents have said they thought it was effective. She believes that the impact of this type of a program is hard to judge in the short term and that its effects will be felt "down the road when more kids at high school do not hesitate to take the math and science courses offered."

Leona Liupakka, math teacher and math coordinator of Oaklea Middle School in Junction City, Oregon, said that this will be the fourth year they have used Family Math in grades 5-8. They conduct classes one night per week for a month to introduce parents and kids to the program. As many as thirty-six families have participated in some of the sessions. According to Liupakka, "It has created a tremendous interest in mathematics by parents and students." At one session, Liupakka said, a father engaged in one of the activities asked, "Do you have to do this at school? Can I take it home so I can solve it?" He and the kids went home with the materials and returned them the next day with the satisfaction of having worked out the exercise. They attended all the remaining sessions and continue to be interested in the

program. As in other schools, there has been no formal evaluation of the program, but parents are excited about it. One parent whose child was in a class where Family Math was not being used commented, "I hope we get to do this."

The EQUALS office at Berkeley admits that evaluation of Family Math programs across the country has been primarily through extensive interviews and through questionnaires answered by teachers and class participants. A report from their office states:

The results show that over 90% of parents who attended courses regularly played math games with their children and helped with their homework, and 75% of parents indicated they learned more about math and how it was taught in their children's school. Half of parents followed up the class by buying a math puzzle or game book, while 27% purchased a math refresher book and 18% went to take another math class.

Presently, research is underway, through a National Science Foundation grant, to evaluate the effects of the program on parents' mathematical confidence and competence, student performance, and the home-school relationship.

The developers of Family Math believe that its success lies in the fact that it provides a supportive environment for the development of math skills, has a content that is presented in a way that explains how mathematical concepts are interrelated, models a teaching style that engenders positive attitudes toward problem-solving, and shows a link to careers and the future through role models and career-based activities.

Success with the Family Math program has stimulated the development of Family Science, Family Computing, and Family Algebra. These are being offered in the Bay Area even at the high school level. One parent who participated in Family Computing with his son made the comment, "My God, now when he comes home he talks with me." Of these other programs, only the workshop for Family Science will be offered at PSU during the coming academic year. It is scheduled for July 14 and 15, 1989.

Schools interested in obtaining more information about Family Math can contact the sources listed in Appendix A. A film entitled *We All Count in FAMILY MATH* shows what actually goes on in Family Math classes and how some families are using the ideas and materials.

Summary

The two programs described in this chapter illustrate how families can be actively engaged in the academic development of their children. They have been highly effective in promoting academic success, but equally important, they are ways that families can share in the education process in a pleasant, enjoyable atmosphere. As one father commented, "It sure beats the

pleasant, enjoyable atmosphere. As one father commented, "It sure beats the 'What did you do at school today?' 'Nothing' dialogue." But as examples cited in this Bulletin indicate, the programs, although effective and enjoyable, do not always receive strong support from parents. Sometimes schools are forced to conduct the program without the level of parental involvement that was intended to be an integral part of its operation. It is up to the teachers and the administrators to ensure that families feel wanted and that their interaction with the school is considered essential for the academic and social development of their children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This Bulletin has cited research studies and provided examples of schools that demonstrate that parent involvement in the education of their children results not only in their higher academic achievement but also in the social development of the family and the community. Most schools use parent involvement at the building level, and this is a good starting point. Parents who volunteer at school convey to their children that schooling is important. That attitude can stimulate achievement in children, and it can also increase parents' own sense of self-esteem and set up a "social capital" dynamic (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Some parents who volunteer in schools become motivated to return to school. M. Sandra Reeves (1988) also reports that some parents have also completed college and entered professions. Cultivating involvement can occur at the level of the family, the school, the district, or the state. This Bulletin concludes with recommendations for each of these sectors.

What Parents Can Do

A monograph prepared by the National School Boards Association (1988) *First Teachers: Parent Involvement in Public Schools*, suggests that parents who want to improve their children's academic achievement should:

- provide books and a place for studying
- establish routines for meals, bedtime, and homework
- monitor the amount of time spent watching TV
- limit the hours of after-school jobs
- discuss school events
- help them meet deadlines

By doing these things, parents can promote their children's achievement. But more can be done if parents become actively involved in the schools.

What Teachers Can Do

According to a survey conducted by the Center for Social Organization of Schools and quoted in the August 1988 issue of the *CABE Journal* ("Ideas for Involving Parents"), teachers who actively and successfully promote parent participation frequently use the following methods:

- Ask the parents to read aloud to the child or listen to him/her read. This is a technique used most often by many teachers.
- Ask the parents to sign a child's homework. Besides involving the parents, this also keeps them informed of their child's progress.
- Encourage parents to drill students on math and spelling.
- Suggest the parents help the child with workbook and homework lessons.
- Encourage parents to ask the child to discuss his/her school day activities.
- Suggest things at home that parents can use to teach their children. For example. . . alphabetizing books or spices on a shelf at home.
- Send home suggestions for games or group activities related to the child's schoolwork that can be played by parents and child.
- Invite parents to the classroom to watch how the child is taught. This helps the parents see how the teacher teaches and may give parents ideas on what they can do at home with their children.
- Encourage parents to take their children to the library regularly and frequently.

What School Boards Can Do

If parental involvement is to be maintained, parents need the support of the community in which they live. They must realize that their involvement contributes not only to what teachers expect for specific problem areas or enrichment exercises, but also to creating an integrated environment for a child. Parents can best accept that role when they see and hear it espoused by other (nonacademic) members of their community. Members of the school board, both individually and as a body, can foster the development of a community that reinforces values that contribute to achievement. The board can also make it clear to school administrators and teachers that they are supported in their efforts to promote parental involvement.

The NSBA monograph, *First Teachers*, also has the following recommendations for school boards:

- Communicate the importance of parental involvement to administrators, teachers and parents.

- Ask parents regularly and formally to offer their services to the school or district.
- Publicize examples of how parents can become involved, such as serving as classroom resources or chaperoning a field trip.
- Examine policies and practices that may discourage parent involvement.
- Provide funding to educate all school staff on the value of parent involvement.
- Work with the district's legal counsel to develop a policy on communicating with noncustodial parents.

What the State Can Do

Although school policies are most strongly influenced at the local level, the state can also contribute to the promotion of better school-home relationships. Some examples of funding assistance were mentioned in this Bulletin, but there are other roles the state can play. The Summer 1988 issue of *State Education Leader*, published by the Education Commission of the States, Denver, lists ten recommendations that came from a conference held for educators, researchers, policy-makers, directors of national organizations, and parents (see "What States Can Do" 1988). They are summarized below.

1. **Leadership:** State officials can use their positions to raise public awareness about the benefits of family involvement, creating a climate that fosters and supports greater family participation in the schools and demonstrating a positive attitude about how important it is for families to be involved in the education of their children.
2. **Innovations:** Encourage creativity in schools and school districts by designing innovative funding strategies for family involvement programs.
3. **Incentives:** Develop an incentive system to encourage parents to become more actively involved. . . and to encourage college and university faculty to work with schools and communities on encouraging school-family collaboration.
4. **Recognition:** Recognize districts, schools, programs, and individuals for contributions or participation in family involvement programs and recognize businesses that have innovative programs that encourage employees to be involved in the schools.
5. **Training:** Provide training for teachers, administrators, and parents on how to work together to improve student achievement and train teachers and administrators to effectively encourage family participation.
6. **Enabling legislation:** Emphasize legislation and policies that facilitate family involvement.
7. **Models:** Facilitate school and family involvement by developing model programs and demonstration projects.
8. **Technical assistance:** Provide technical assistance to schools and families through parent centers where parents can participate in workshops and get materials or through a clearinghouse for information about promising programs.

9. **Funding:** Consider funding alternatives such as providing money to schools for family involvement programs and activities, funding demonstration projects, encouraging corporate "mini-grants" to schools to develop programs that involve families.
10. **Accountability and evaluation:** Design appropriate accountability mechanisms to assess family involvement programs, including criteria to be incorporated into the accreditation process. (A brochure detailing these and other recommendations is available from the ECS Distribution Center, listed in Appendix A).

Although parental involvement is not a new concept, its full impact has only recently been recognized. A coordinated effort to utilize the educational and social resources of parents in the educational process will benefit children of all backgrounds and thereby contribute immensely to society.

Appendix

Additional information about programs cited in this Bulletin can be obtained from the following sources:

Reading Is Fundamental:
Program Services Division
Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.
600 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Room 500
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D. C. 20560
(202) 287-3220

Family Math:
Mary Jo Cittadino
Network Coordinator
EQUALS
Lawrence Hall of Science
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-1823

Peggy Noone
Northwest EQUALS
PSU/DCE
P.O. Box 1491
Portland, OR 97207
(503) 464-3045

Additional information about action at the state level can be obtained from the following source:

Education Commission of the States Distribution Center
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80295
(303) 830-3692

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